

Strategies for Effective Practicing

Practicing for Improvement vs. Playing for Pleasure

Practicing for Improvement – structured time with your instrument in which you set specific goals for yourself and work systematically to achieve those goals.

Playing for Pleasure – Playing through things that you enjoy alone or with others for the purpose of having fun.

Hopefully, your Rehearsals and your Practice Sessions will involve a little bit of BOTH of these!

1. DO NOT start at the beginning!
2. Break it down, fix the pieces, put them back together again.
3. Structure your practice time.



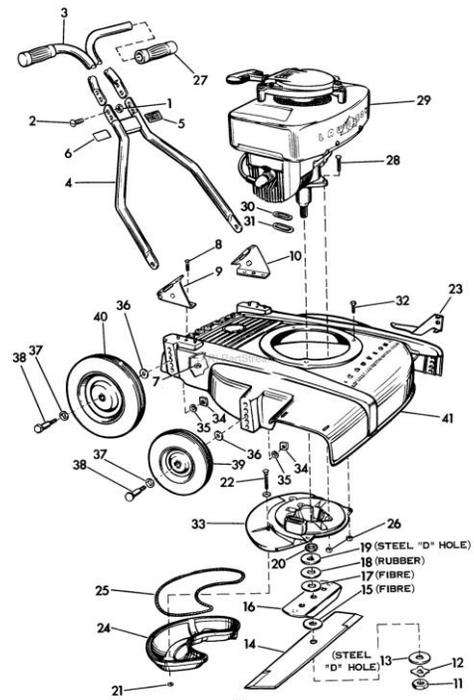
1. DO NOT start at the beginning!

- Identify and circle the tough parts (visually or in rehearsals).
- Start there!
- If you make a mistake, STOP. Go back and start just before the mistake. Repeat. If there's still a mistake, do it again, but slow it down. *(I highly recommend using a metronome, AKA lie detector)*
- Use the metronome to find the tempo at which you can play the excerpt perfectly. Do it a few times at that tempo. Then, speed it up 4 clicks. Play it 3 times perfectly, then speed it up 4 more clicks. Continue this process until you get it to your goal tempo, or until you get bored. Write in your final tempo and the date in your music. Start at that tempo for your next practice session.



2. Break it down, fix the pieces, then put them back together again.

- Usually, when we make a mistake, the issue is actually happening between 2 notes. Start by identifying the measure where the issue is, then slow it down and try to identify EXACTLY where the issue or difficulty is happening, meaning what 2 notes are causing the issue?



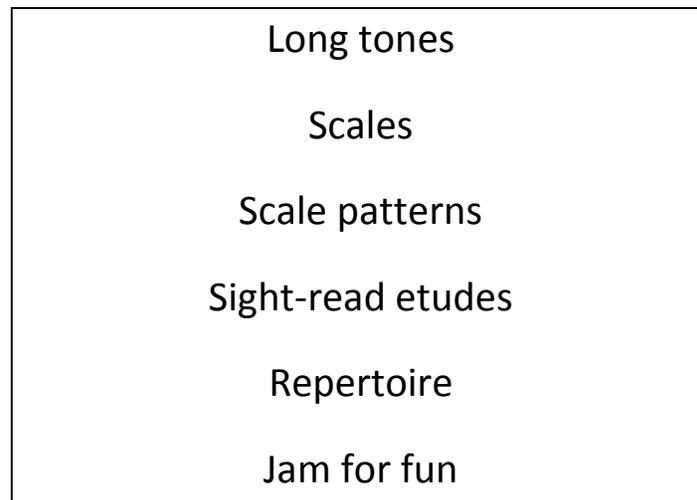
- When you identify those two notes, just play those two notes, back and forth.
- (Keep your fingers/hands close to the instrument. Make sure you're not maintaining too much tension or moving too far from the instrument to cause the issue.)
- After you get comfortable going between those two notes, put it in rhythm (keep it under tempo if necessary). Then add in a few notes before that to get used to going into it. Then, add in a few notes after it to get used to moving out of it. Finally, put it into context by playing the entire phrase in which the issue was contained. Now, work it back up to tempo (if necessary) by following step 1.

3. Structure your practice time.

- Where: Be consistent with where you practice. Pick a quiet location that is well-lit, allows for good posture, allows you to focus without interruption (if possible), and has a music stand available (if possible).
- When: Try to get in a routine where you can practice every day, preferably around the same time every day. The *amount* of time that you practice is not as important as having *consistency* in doing it regularly.
- What: Plan your practice routine so that you are efficient, focused, and still can have fun.



Here is a sample practice routine...



Tips:

It's not necessary to assign a specific amount of time for each activity. Some days you may want to spend more or less time on each activity.

I always recommend using a metronome.

If your face gets tired or you get bored, take a break. Don't burn yourself out physically or mentally. It's perfectly OK to break up your daily practicing into a few sessions – you do not need to do everything in one practice session.

Reaching a state of mindlessness when practicing is a good thing. If your mind wanders to other topics, let it wander. This means that your muscle memory is kicking in and that's good.

Research suggests that practicing before going to bed (or pretend-practicing in your mind without your instrument) is at least somewhat effective in helping you to progress towards your goals.



We will make music together again soon!

Vash di hent!